

Indiana Department of Environmental Management E-News News Release

For immediate release
March 11, 2010

State environmental agency finds risk from air toxics in Southwest Indianapolis similar to other urban areas
Vehicles largest local source of air toxics

After two years of monitoring and another year of data analysis, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) determined that the concentrations of air toxics in Southwest Indianapolis are similar to those in other urban areas in Indiana and the Midwest.

Motor vehicles within the study area accounted for 38 percent of the health risk from air toxics, while industrial sources only accounted for 13 percent of the health risk. Background sources, such as lawnmowers, home furnaces, and sources from outside the study area, are responsible for the remaining 49 percent of the health risk.

The study looked at the impact of breathing air toxics on human health. Short- and long-term health effects were evaluated, including cancer risk. The study did not find that immediate or emergency action is necessary to reduce air toxics in the area.

Benzene and acrolein were measured above health-protective levels for long-term health effects. Acrolein levels are a nation-wide concern and risk in Southwest Indianapolis from acrolein is similar to risks levels across the country. Benzene levels contribute a cancer risk of 15 in a million over 70 years, using health-protective assumptions. This level of risk is also comparable to that experienced elsewhere in the Indianapolis area, and urban areas across the country.

“We used health-protective assumptions in the study so we don’t underestimate the impact of air toxics on Hoosiers,” said Thomas Easterly, IDEM Commissioner. “Based on the 60,000 residents living in the study area, the study estimated less than one additional cancer case in 70 years due to exposure to benzene. However, we expect the actual benzene risk to be lower than that.”

The results were announced at a public meeting on Thursday evening at the Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center. IDEM staff, environmental experts, and local community leaders explained the results to the public during a public presentation and an open house.

Air toxics include metals and hazardous air pollutants that can cause short- and long-term health effects, including cancer. The study measured the level of 86 air toxics in Southwest Indianapolis from 2006 to 2008 and used computer models to estimate the impact of 168 air toxics on human health throughout the study area.

More information about the study can be found at www.idem.IN.gov/4500.htm.

About IDEM

IDEM (www.idem.IN.gov) implements federal and state regulations regarding the environment. Through compliance assistance, incentive programs and educational

outreach, the agency encourages and aids businesses and citizens in protecting Hoosiers and our environment.

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